

The Ryder Cup

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Team Europe

Luke Donald

Guy Kinnings

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Delighted to be joined today by 2025 European Ryder Cup captain, Luke Donald, and the Ryder Cup executive director, Guy Kinnings. So, Guy, we'll come to you just for a few words first, I think, before we get some of Luke's thoughts.

GUY KINNINGS: Thanks, Clare. Thanks, everyone, for joining today. On behalf of everyone at Ryder Cup Europe, we're absolutely delighted that Luke will be returning as captain to the 2025 Ryder Cup in Bethpage Black. I've been lucky enough to know Luke throughout his career, and his approach to captaincy for the 2023 matches in Rome was pretty much as we had anticipated. It was calm, it was measured, it was meticulous, and it was successful, and he really was an exceptional captain in so many ways.

Some of those ways were there for all of us to see, many more of them for only those who saw behind the scenes. From his leadership of the team, the 12 players, the caddies, the vice captains, and then all of us, the team behind the team, he was truly impressive throughout. He clearly has the respect and support of the players. You saw that from the moments after victory and from the backroom staff and everyone else involved in Ryder Cup Europe and everyone else we've spoken to.

So it's very much a question of whether Luke wanted to be considered again. It was a huge commitment and it will be a huge commitment, particularly when you're as invested as Luke is. So I'm delighted that after taking -- we encouraged him and Diane to take a little time out, take a breather, give it some thought. I'm delighted that he's decided to be considered and to be leading Europe again in just under two years' time.

We all know going to New York will be a considerable challenge. No team has retained the Ryder Cup on away soil since Medinah in 2012 when of course Luke played a fairly pivotal role leading out singles.

But we've got a really strong foundation built on following that great victory in Rome. We have a very young united team full of potential and a captain in Luke who showed at Marco Simone he knows how to galvanize that team to get the best from them, and that's a pretty strong combination.

So it's my great pleasure, Luke, to welcome you back into the role. We very much look forward to working with you once again over the next two years as we aim to retain the Ryder Cup. Thank you.

LUKE DONALD: Thanks, Guy.

THE MODERATOR: Luke, if we could have your thoughts of returning once again as captain.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, obviously I'm delighted. The Ryder Cup experience for me in 2023 was an amazing one. I really enjoyed the whole journey. As Guy said, it's a full-time job, it's certainly a lot of work, but obviously the culture we created in that team and obviously to see the team bond together and come out on top was very gratifying to me. Even when I was lifting the trophy on Sunday and hearing the guys shout, "Two more years," in the back of my mind, I thought, I don't really want to let these guys down, but I still wanted some time to think about it.

So I'm very interested in trying to create some history. To be only the second Ryder Cup captain, European Ryder Cup captain, to possibly go back-to-back is something that's very interesting to me and a great challenge and excites me. I love what the Ryder Cup represents. I've had so many amazing experiences as a Ryder Cup player and obviously as a captain, and to be given the honor to go back-to-back is very special for me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Luke. We'll take some questions.

Q. Congratulations, Luke. I was just wondering, were there any sleepless nights before you made this decision, and if so, what finally swung it for you to decide to stay on?

LUKE DONALD: I don't know about sleepless nights. Again, I mentioned this just earlier. I think not often in life are you given great opportunities, and I really feel like this is an amazing opportunity. I was given a great opportunity to do Rome, and I certainly took it with both hands and to obviously be given the opportunity to go back-to-back is something that I love. I love the challenge. I think even in my individual career, I've never really backed away from those kind of challenges. I love to improve and love to figure out ways to be at the top of the game. Certainly to get to No. 1 for a player of my stature, the way I play the game, wasn't easy, but it gave me a great amount of pride to be able to do that.

It's just the same as being a captain last time in 2023. You know, we're up against a strong team coming off the worst ever loss we had at Whistling Straights. To kind of figure a way to give the team a better opportunity for success in Rome was very gratifying and very pleasing to me. So playing away is a different animal. It's a bigger challenge. It's something that excites me and that's really the reason why I want to do this.

Q. To follow, you said on the Monday morning, no doubt with a nice hangover, that you were aware you could walk away and not risk sort of you ruining your winning legacy, as it were. Were you always sort of 50/50 then or were you, in the back of your mind, always thinking, I'm probably going to do this again?

LUKE DONALD: To be honest, I was just trying to get through those interviews after about three hours of sleep and many drinks of champagne out of the cup. So I wasn't thinking too hard about it at that point. Certainly, we had some discussions, myself, my wife, my family, the last week.

But to be honest, the last few weeks I've just tried to enjoy it. I think many times in your individual career when you win, you're playing the next week and you don't really get to enjoy it. I certainly haven't scheduled any playing opportunities after the Ryder Cup for a reason. Whether I won or lost, I wanted to take the time to either enjoy it or think back and think about how I could have done something better. It was a few weeks, really, after the Ryder Cup that I started to really think about it.

Q. Guy touched on this, but you've played in majors in the Big Apple and on Long Island. A lot of us on the call have been to majors in that area, that part of the world. What's your own experience of playing in majors and having that sort of Big Apple crowd there always, on every hole, and also how much of a factor can they be getting behind their countrymen in two years' time, especially in New York?

LUKE DONALD: Certainly that's part of the challenge. All Ryder Cups are loud and boisterous and New York won't be any different and maybe even more so. But I played at Bethpage a few times and the New Yorkers love their sport and they love some jostling and all that kind of that goes with it. Obviously I have 22 months to try and figure out how to get the guys in the right frame of mind to deal with that, with the crowd.

It's the same every time you go away and New York might be a touch -- a notch above that, but again, that's to be seen. I've got 22 months now to try to figure that and those were sort of the things that will certainly be swishing around in my brain over the next few weeks.

Q. You mentioned the two-year chance. I just wondered whether you'd spoken to some of the senior players again just to confirm that it wasn't heat of the moment. I'm sure it wasn't.

LUKE DONALD: Well, I get to see some of those guys on a regular basis because they live in the Jupiter area where I live and, yeah, certainly those -- yeah, a few of them have intimated that they would love for me to do it again. So I don't think it was in the heat of the moment. I hope not. Certainly I sent a message already to the group that we had and to those carrying on and I got a lot of great messages back.

So, again, it was very gratifying, very humbling, to hear that on Sunday, and I heard that in the media afterwards and going forward. So, again, that was certainly a big part of my decision to do it once more.

Q. Just to follow up, overturning that record defeat was a huge challenge, but is winning away even bigger?

LUKE DONALD: I think so. As Rory said in the press, that's the ultimate to try to win away from home. Certainly done it twice as a player, but it's not easy and it hasn't been done many times in Ryder Cups, and it certainly hasn't been done very often in European. You know, still, we have to go back to 2012 for it to be in the U.S.

So it's not easy. We know that in any sport when you have the crowd behind you it's a big advantage and certainly I'll have to figure out ways to kind of counter that.

Q. Just a quick one, really. You obviously got longer this time in your role than you did last time. Are there any real benefits to be gained from having a longer run in?

LUKE DONALD: Anytime you have a bit more time, you can space probably the workload over the 22 months I have now instead of 14. But, you know, again, I think we created a great culture in 2023. The players were certainly in a great spirit and a great place, I think, to be successful. Again, my idea is to continue that culture, but there will be different approaches needed for an away match.

Q. Does it feel sweeter this time? Because, obviously, Henrik was there last time, initially. Does it feel sweeter just to have done this the right way, if you like?

LUKE DONALD: (No Microphone) -- come my way 16 months ago now, and I took it, and I think that the players and the Tour, obviously, think I did a great job, and to be sitting back here with an opportunity to do that again is very humbling and I'm very appreciative of the opportunity.

Q. The last time Europe won in the U.S., Medinah, you beat Tiger Woods quite memorably. Is there a desire to do the same? Because obviously there's been a lot of suggestion that -- well certainly a lot of Americans would like him to be the captain.

LUKE DONALD: Well, the desire to win, whoever the captain is, is strong. Yeah, obviously, Tiger's been mentioned as a possible candidate and we'll have to wait and see. If it's him great, if it's someone else, great.

In the meantime, my role is to try and, again, start the preparations and try and figure out the best opportunity for us to be successful again come September in 2025 in New York. So that's really my focus.

Q. If you'll forgive me for sticking with the Tiger subject. Obviously, he's the biggest name in golf. Would there be a part of you that would relish that, though? Because, obviously, it would throw up an enormous amount of --

LUKE DONALD: I've got to play a lot of times with Tiger in my career. I have great admiration for what he's done, what he's done in the game. You would think he was going to be a Ryder Cup captain at some point and if it's this time, great, if it's another time, great, but, again, it's not really my focus.

Again, it's something a little bit out of my control, so I'm not really trying to think about it and once it happens, then we'll address it. But if it's Tiger or someone else, again, I'm looking forward to the challenge of being captain once more.

Q. Just as a final one from me, how much of an appeal

was it for you in choosing to do another two years, that you've got this sort of young crop of players coming through? We've obviously seen Ludvig and Nicolai have very noticeable wins in the last couple of weeks. How much of a bearing did that have on your decision, if will you?

LUKE DONALD: Again, a lot can happen in a two-year span. We don't know, obviously -- when I took the role 16 months ago, the team looked a little sparse, potentially. I was trying to find really 12 players. But then as the Ryder Cup got closer and closer, these guys really upped their game. We saw potential in some of these guys, but we didn't know how good they were going to be. It was great to see the guys like Ludvig and Nicolai and some other guys really step up when it came up to the crunch time in Ryder Cup.

It was so gratifying for me to see those guys go on to further their games and improve. Often being in the Ryder Cup -- I remember in my first Ryder Cup in 2004. It gave me so much confidence knowing that I could perform under that pressure in the biggest kind of spotlight. We saw that with Ludvig and Nicolai winning on the same day. It was extremely gratifying for me as a captain.

Obviously, I had studied a lot of those guys for 14 months, looking at their talents and looking how they performed, and we were pretty confident as a team and the vice captains that they could perform under pressure, and certainly, seeing them win has put a smile on the captain's face.

Q. Normally when you win, you're not really thinking about things that went wrong or what you would like to do differently, but I'm assuming you've had some time to think about what you would like to do differently this time around. Can you kind of share some of that with us?

LUKE DONALD: Well, as I said, I think we created a great culture. That will obviously be my number one priority, is to continue that and continue that into Bethpage. I think playing away brings different approaches and different challenges. Again, you're going to have to deal with the crowd, you're going to have to deal with the U.S. setting up the golf course. There's things that we had control of that we certainly don't have control of this time.

So, again, I've got a lot of time to kind of get my head around all those things. But yeah, there will be a different approach. I think just the way I've even done this in my individual career, you know, it's always good to have that growth mindset. You always want to figure out how you can be better, how you can improve, and these next 22

months will be me trying to figure out that way to give ourselves a better chance to win away from home, which is very difficult.

Q. Just to ask Guy something. Guy, you mentioned all the attributes of Luke's last Ryder Cup win and the last thing you mentioned was the success. If Luke wasn't successful, no matter how good he was as captain, could you see yourself naming him captain again?

GUY KINNINGS: Well, first of all, I don't name him. I listen to the input of a lot of stakeholders, all of whom will weigh up sort of the qualities and attributes of the job that needs to be done and who is the best person for it. That's the sole purpose -- we debrief after an event, we look forward, and you just simply are in a position of going, okay, what is the job in hand. We've got to find a way of making sure giving ourselves the best chance of winning in 2025. Who is the best person to do that. You weigh up all of the options, you listen to people a lot smarter than me about all of those things.

But I think when you talk about the attributes, and I mentioned some of those, of course everyone who worked on the event got to witness how Luke kind of assimilated and learned from a lot of the success and the successful formula and model that had gone before, but also then kind of put his own stamp on a lot of new innovations in there.

So I would say this is a decision which has been made simply on the basis of who is the right man to give us the best chance of trying to retain the trophy.

Q. Are you going to keep the same back group staff? Because they seemed quite a capable bunch.

LUKE DONALD: As I said, we created a great culture, but those decisions will start to form in my head over these coming months. I'm sure someone like a Francesco would love to play in New York as, I'm sure he feels like he still has an opportunity to do it. You saw Justin Rose at age 43 or something have great Ryder Cup himself. That's inspiring, I'm sure, to someone like that.

So I think, like any Ryder Cup captaincy, these decisions take time. I'll certainly look at all the candidates and all the vice captains that were under me and have conversations with them and see where their mind is as well. So again, nothing has been decided yet. That process starts right now.

Q. Guy, was the same process followed to appoint the captain? Did you have previous captains on the panel or was it different?

GUY KINNINGS: The process has been adapted a little bit in the sense that we have taken the input and done a full debrief with all of the stakeholders in all of the different areas. So we have listened to people, including that group, but others that will have views on, as we said, what is the best opportunity for us going forward.

So we always do a full debrief. We did that pretty quickly straight after the end of Rome, and it was pretty clear that there was overwhelming support within all of those stakeholder groups, which certainly made the process fairly straightforward.

Q. Rory McIlroy said recently in a newspaper interview that he was a bit worried about your reaction to his car park row on the Saturday night. When you met in the team room later, you said you thought it was effing great. I'm just wondering what it was about that incident that you found so inspiring for the team and is that the kind of attitude they're going to have to bring to Bethpage? Rory wanted to annihilate them, he said, on Sunday.

LUKE DONALD: Well, we have to figure out the right approach and attitude to have in New York. But yeah, the whole Rory thing, you know, we see this in every Ryder Cup. You know, there's always passion that boils over. We have seen it many, many times in different situations, and this was no different. It's an amazingly passionate event and these things happen. Joey I think realized he had probably overstepped the mark and apologized pretty quickly afterwards. But the fact that Rory was passionate about it just shows that he cares. And I love that, and I love the fact that we're there to win and it's okay to be passionate in this, in this environment.

Obviously, we had a talk that night and we used that fuel to our advantage. Certainly it wasn't anything that we were terribly worried about. We were in a great position, we were 10 and a half points to five and a half points up. We weren't complacent at all, but we were excited about how fired up Rory was more than anything. So, nothing wrong with that, it happens in all sports, and especially a big part of the Ryder Cup.

Q. I know you probably haven't decided yet, but the qualifying system worked out very nicely for you. But were you happy with it, was there anything you maybe might tweak a little bit there, or is that all still to be decided?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, still to be decided. Again, I think it worked well this time around. We had six picks and those picks performed well. I think we were able to pick some experienced players, some rookies, it was a nice freedom

to have as captain. Again, those decisions have yet to be decided, and that certainly the priority list probably number one priority for me to try and figure out, you know, is this the best way going forward. I'll certainly sit down with myself and the Ryder Cup team and whoever's a part of the team, backroom staff by then, and figure out what might be the best way forward and we'll go from there.

Q. Could I pose this question to Guy, and this is based on something that Justin Thomas said here in the Bahamas yesterday about golf course setup and how he feels like it's maybe, for the home team, gotten a little exaggerated. He suggested maybe the best option would be to have a neutral party set up the courses for the Ryder Cup. Can I just get your thoughts on that?

GUY KINNINGS: Yeah, I mean, I think it's recognized that there are always, you know, slight advantages to hosting and being at home. I think, if you recall, when we first started playing on the Marco Simone course for an Italian Open, the sense was that a very U.S. favorable course had been designed. Of course, until it's finally set up you don't know.

The reality is that I think there's a sense around this, but actually in many ways these players, in large part, play week-in, week-out together, and I'm not sure that there's an obvious way to get, gain a huge advantage, I think, in the sense that there are other factors that will come into play in terms of what motivates a team to play as well as it possibly can. Certainly everyone wants to create something that's as fair as possible to create the most compelling sporting contest. So I'm pretty sure that will be the goal with whoever's hosting.

Q. Guy, you've sort of ripped up convention in reappointing Luke. Do you see this as possibly the template going forward with a home and away captaincy, or is this just a one-off for what Luke achieved in Rome?

GUY KINNINGS: I think our goal, and we will do this after every match, we'll obviously have a look at things. As I said, we debrief, we listen to all the relevant stakeholders, everyone who has a voice in the planning for the event, to decide what is the best way going forward. Right now what we've done is made the decision which is based on the goal of retaining the trophy in 2025. So I don't think that it should be read anything more than that. What we've done is taken the circumstances we have in front of us and made what I hope, which I know is the right decision, and made the, got the right man at the helm.

Q. One for Luke, if I could, is there anything, any

incident or any letter or any interaction that you've had since Rome which has really brought it home to you what it meant, what that victory meant to you?

LUKE DONALD: To be honest, just talking to the players on Sunday night I think was the most gratifying for me, just hearing from them, some of the embraces we had on the golf course, the tears we shared. I think it just showed how much it means to all of us. We really value what the Ryder Cup represents, to be able to come together as a team, you know, and to obviously work quite hard for 14 months and try and create an atmosphere where they could succeed, and they did, was very gratifying to me. But, you know, just hearing from the players and those conversations and those little moments, I think those are what will stay with me forever.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Luke and Guy, for your time. Congratulations again, Luke.

LUKE DONALD: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: And best of luck.

LUKE DONALD: Thank you very much.

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